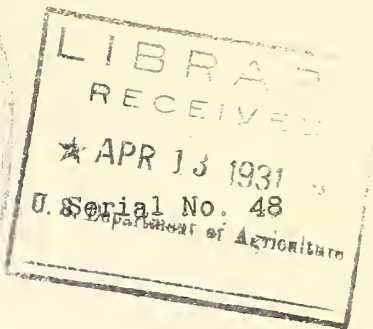
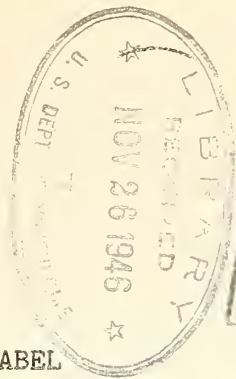


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Excerpt from a radio talk by  
W. R. M. Wharton, chief, eastern district,  
Food and Drug Administration, U. S.  
Department of Agriculture, broadcast  
through WJZ, and associated N.B.C.  
stations, April 6, 1931.



### HOW TO READ THE LABEL

#### Dentifrices

There are many good dentifrice preparations on the market. Today, most of the principal brands are honestly labeled.

Now, what are all the purposes which dentifrice preparations have been alleged to serve in statements made upon their labels? They have been sold as cleansing agents, for whitening or beautifying the teeth, for tooth preservation, to remove film, tartar, or mucin, to correct bad breath, to prevent tooth decay, to neutralize acidity, to harden the gums. They have been sold as having value in preventing disease because of their claimed antiseptic properties. They have been sold as preventives and cures of mouth diseases, including pyorrhea, trench mouth, Vincent's disease, etc. In other words, one or all of these merits have been claimed for various tooth-cleaning preparations.

Do dentifrice preparations of themselves have any value at all in the treatment of pyorrhea, trench mouth, bleeding and spongy or receding gums, or similar mouth disorders? They do not, and this is the consensus of present-day dental opinion.

Do dentifrice preparations possess any effective antiseptic properties? They do not. Their method of use makes it essentially impossible for them to be effective as antiseptics. Dentifrice preparations have little or no beneficial results as antacids. Practically none of them, by reason of any inherent qualities, prevents tooth decay. They do not permanently correct bad breath. They do not preserve the teeth.

What is left, then, for dentifrices to do? A very important job. They are simply agents for cleansing -- they improve the appearance of the teeth by helping to keep them clean. Now you have the truth. Dentifrice preparations serve one purpose and one purpose only and that is as cleansing agents.

Dentifrice preparations are composed of ingredients common in commerce. Among these ingredients are: precipitated chalk, soap, salt, baking soda, borax, magnesia, glycerine, alcohol, saccharin for sweetening, flavors and medicinal oils for taste, water, and color. Some have a medicinal taste, but that does not mean they have therapeutic merit in treatment of diseased conditions of the mouth.

No dentifrice has a real antiseptic value in destroying bacteria in the mouth. Even though they should have such an effect, it would necessarily be a very transitory one, for they are applied but briefly in the daily cleansings of the teeth.

Before your Federal Food and Drug Administration effectuated the removal of claims for antiseptic value from labels of dentifrices, some such preparations claimed antiseptic ingredients. A statement to that effect may have read, "This preparation contains the famous antiseptic 'Whatferol.'" If you looked for the meaning of this word in a chemical dictionary you would not find it. Probably it was the manufacturer's mouth-wash product. Whatever it was, it could not have any particularly beneficial result in the destruction of pathogenic germs. This follows because the dentifrice has such brief contact with the mouth surfaces.

As for the label claims formerly made of curative properties for acid mouth and for the horrible conditions pictured as resulting from acid mouth, none of the dentifrices making the claims were especially useful for this purpose. Some acids are normally present in all mouths, and scientists say that acid mouth does not contribute in any particular extent to tooth decay. Even if it did, the application of a dentifrice on a tooth brush twice a day would have but a very fleeting effect in the correction of the acid condition.

Now cleanliness of the teeth is a proper matter of pride to civilized persons. The beauty of white teeth is a distinct asset to any person. Dentifrices can and do contribute to our personal pride and pulchritude by cleansing the teeth. No preparation, however, will safely whiten discolored teeth suddenly. A few preparations marketed claim on their labels, and claim truthfully that they will make yellow teeth white. But some of these are dangerous, for some contain hydrochloric acid. You will use tooth-cleaning preparations containing hydrochloric acid at your peril, for the acid may injure the delicate enamel of the teeth. Unfortunately, you will not find the presence of hydrochloric acid in a preparation claiming to whiten teeth declared on the label, for such use is not covered under the caustic poison act. However, my advice to you is that you investigate the composition of a substance offered for sale as a tooth-whitening preparation before employing it. If your teeth are dark or brown, employ a cleansing dentifrice, but do not expect to find a dentifrice that will safely keep them white and pearly like those of your more fortunate neighbor.

Read labels on dentifrice preparations. Apply the rule of reason, apply knowledge, and remember that such preparations are valuable only to keep the teeth clean. Remember that dentifrices have no magic composition; they are compounded of ingredients ordinary in commerce. Remember that while the Federal food and drugs act controls the statements made upon labels or in printed circulars accompanying the products at the time of sale, it does not control statements in advertisements not accompanying the packages. Do not expect any product to produce benefits which it cannot possibly perform.